

A WINGED REVENGE.

A TALE OF THE FOURTH PLAGUE.

Jackson! It's an ordinary name and Jackson was a very ordinary individual. He was distinguished only by his neckties, he wore a new one every morning as a conscientious duty to society, and the fact that he was one of the Jacksons; a fact that secured him the privilege of setting in the mahogany lined and brass finished inner office of Jackson, Jackson and Jackson—Manufacturers. There was an outer office to the establishment where the actual clerical work was turned out, filled with mere clerks on meagre salaries who were gifted by Fortune only with mathematical brains and not a cousinship or nephewship to the Jacksons.

Needless to say the inner office was most select, the salaries such as comported with the dignities of members of the "clan" Jackson, the duties a sinecure; in fact the appointments were those situations gained only by birth and wire-pulling, usually dominated snaps."

Therein lay Jackson's downfall.—Having absolutely nothing to do but discuss each other's neckties, the latest sporting news and their intrigues at their various restaurants, the cousins, sons and nephews, Jackson, were hard put to it at times to satisfactorily fill in the five hours, per diem, expected of them; ten until twelve and one till four. The slaves in the outer office put on their chains at eight and took them off at six.

Some of the "clan" Jackson manicured away their time, others used the firm's notepaper in various ways; our Jackson killed flies. In a moment of desperate ennui, he one day took a broken rubber band and snapping it at an aggressive blue bottle, slew it. He slew another and finally managed to wear out the afternoon by killing all the flies that came near his desk, they were not many, in that well regulated and aristocratic sanctum. This sport became such an agreeable interlude to the monotony of his days that he practiced it vigorously, assiduously. A knot tied in one end, the business end, of the rubber, was an improvement he found. The habit grew on him, he carried bands in his vest pocket and went on his slaughtering way. A fly to him was as a grey gnat to a trout, he could not resist it. Finally, so deft an assassin did he grow, that he no longer waited for his unsuspecting victims to settle, he voted it too unsportsmanlike, and for the reason that he played only cushion billiards, flushed his game and brought them down on the wing. He moved his desk by diplomatic exchange to the window where the light would attract his prey, so deeply had the habit fastened on him. That the insects had the brains, the temerity to plot revenge never entered his head until after many days. In the office his fellow Jacksonians dubbed him the Spider and bragged of his deadly aim to the envy of fellow holders of "snaps" in neighboring clans. They were great on sobriquets in that office, the wit of the clan was the name dispenser, his best and latest *jeu d'esprit* was to call the "king" of the sanctum, king on account of his irresponsible and unapproachable neckties, Stonewall Jackson "because he's such a thorough brick you know." The Jacksonians were nothing if not English in their language and in their jokes. To Stonewall did the Spider complain of the scarcity of victims. "I actually believe that the beggahs have some

means of communication doucherknow old chap, they are keeping away from me deadly aim. I haven't killed a fly in two days." "Put some sugar on your desk deah boy," suggested the wit, "then you'll soon have game in your preserves." This plan worked well enough for a few days, but within a week Jackson was miserable, not a fly would come within reach of his catapult; not only in the office but his other hunting grounds, for Jackson's habit had grown to be a mania now; the flies were safe from him nowhere except at his fiancée's home, at present Cupid superceded the butcher.

It certainly seemed as if the insects had some method of warning each other, a whole week passed and the flies troubled not Jackson, nor Jackson the flies. Then, slowly, by graduation came the day of reckoning by such subtle degrees that the victim himself hardly realized it at first.

One memorable morning Jackson, seated at his desk in melancholy mood, for he was pining for flies like an opium fiend for his drug, was stirred into unwonted activity by the sight of a magnificent specimen of his prey calmly settled on his blotting pad, busily engaged in apparently washing its face with its fore legs. It was a beauty, not an ordinary *musca domestica* or common house fly, but an immense fellow with bronze green body and iridescent wings gleaming in the sunlight. Slowly, cautiously, Jackson felt for and found his favorite weapon, carefully he stretched the band to its fullest extent and adjusted his aim, then, zip, the knot sped to its mark and miracle! The wretched insect was still there, not maimed, crushed, but intact and apparently oblivious of the attempt on its life. Somewhat staggered, Jackson aimed and fired again, with the same result—the insect unmoved and still cleaning its legs. Perspiration broke out on his brow. "I must be losing my nerve" he muttered looking round to see if any of his fellow clerks had observed his useless bombardment. No, they were all busily engaged or rather disengaged. The blue bottle was still there. Looking carefully at it a horrible fact broke on Jackson's mind. It cast no shadow! His antics aroused a feeble curiosity on his neighbor who languidly enquired the cause. "Do you see that fly on my pad?" "What fly?" "Why that one, that big fellow?" "What are you talking about deah boy, there's no fly there. I say you fellows, Spider's got em, he's seeing flies." It was the truth the fly was a phantom—a ghost.—No one could see it but Spider Jackson. It was the beginning of the end.

At home in his select boarding house that evening began a series of carefully planned torments that drove the shattered nerves of Jackson to the verge of insanity. The bodies of his victims were everywhere. He saw flies in the milk, the butter, the gravy, everywhere, and no one else could find them. On the third complaint the landlady after gravely inspecting the cream pitcher, remarked that "late hours and dissipation played strange tricks on young men's nerves."

In all his haunts, his former hunting grounds, he beheld shadowless flies, his inkpots were full of them, though the janitor was unable to discover them and gave it as his opinion that "Spider Jackson had the trimmings." One place as yet was sacred, his fiancée's home, there he had imolated no unfortunates, there he was at peace for three evenings a week. But alack, they traced him even there. One unhappy evening between the lips extended for a chase salute there buzzed an aggressive fly. "Bother the flies," said the maiden with a charming pout. But Jackson fell back among the cushions. It was the first real fly he had seen or heard for weeks. His other flies, the phantoms, never buzzed. He longed to kill this reality, at last there was something tangible to battle with. But the kiss was still unaccomplished and the lady somewhat astonished at the delay. Three tunes was the osculation essay-

ed and thwarted. "Well did you ever see such a persistent fly, they must be fond of you Jerrold. Why, how funny! There's a circle of them over your head!"

Horrors! The last phase of retributive justice had commenced, it was the fourth plague up to date. From that fatal night in constant attendance upon the fated man was a body guard of flies. While he walked they floated over his head in a gleaming halo, when he sat they settled on a neighboring place of vantage until he moved again. A circle of living buzzing insects. Ye Gods! how they buzzed! At the office they came in with him in the morning and left in the afternoon; at church they came down the aisle with him and lined up on the rail of the pew. At the baths they deserted him while he was in the water waiting for him on the railing. It was horrible! horrible! Nor were the consequences less dire. First came a request from his landlady, then a conge from his fiancée, last and worst blow of all his dismissal from Jackson, Jackson and Jackson. The Jackson himself sentenced him severely, unrepentedly. "Really Jerrold we cannot have you in our—ah—um office any longer. These—er—insects that insist on accompanying you, you must have some reason for it. You really can't be—um—clean you know—Good day—"

He Jerrold Jackson not clean! He the pink of perfection in dress and manners to be told he was not clean.—He went out into the world disgraced.—Unfortunately his uncle was not the only one who held this theory. He was a pariah, an outcast, acquaintances shunned him, new friends quickly dropped him. "One can't walk down the street you know with a fellah that's got a lot of beastly flies over his head as if he were a rotten watermelon, bah jove." Cast out from his situation he was helpless, he could do nothing, was he not a Jackson? His money dwindled, left him. Restaurants, even when he was in funds denied him, it gave the place a bad name they said. Free lunch counters were barred to him, the lowest of lodging houses refused him and his constant attendants the flies. Worn to bones, ragged, starving the pitiless insects never left him for an instant. He had long ago given up the idea of killing them. There was only one thing left, one end to his misery. Death by starvation or suicide. Even this was denied. It was still only August and winter was a long way off with its prospects of immunity from flydom when the last act in the drama closed.

One warm sultry night, when the weary inhabitants tossed restlessly on their more or less luxurious beds, in an old deserted shack on the outskirts of the town lay all that remained in life of the once gay if not brilliant Jerrold Jackson. Stretched on a pile of sacking in one corner of the hovel he was trying, not unsuccessfully to gain some sleep, for miracle of miracles since noon the flies had left him. The first streaks of daylight were struggling through the chinks in the boarded up windows on his slumbering form, when far down the road a hum made itself apparent, a hum as of a myriad insects, a hum that rapidly resolved itself into a black cloud of living atoms. Had it been Egypt the mystery would have readily resolved itself into a plague of locusts. It was a plague of flies, of revengeful, blood-thirsty flies, sent not by a mighty prophet to devour the land but urged by their own wrongs to wreak retribution on one wretched human being.

In the gray twilight of the morning the shack stood black against the sky, black with—flies—by the trillion. They swarmed in by every crevice and crack through the ruined roof, the chimney, the door. The dawn grew brighter and the winged army came out and flew heavily away. Inside the shack was silence and—vacancy.—A heap of sacks in the corner—nothing else but dust and cobwebs.

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